

AMPLIFYING SOLID-STATE IMAGING DEVICE, AND
METHOD FOR DRIVING THE SAME

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 The present invention relates to an amplifying solid-state imaging device and a method for driving the same.

An amplifying solid-state imaging device, as well as a CCD solid-state imaging device, adopts "electronic shuttering" as a sort of electronic diaphragm. The 10 "electronic shuttering" operation is performed to reset a signal charge storage section just before a photodiode in each pixel starts to store the signal charge, which has been created by the photodiode itself through photoelectric conversion, thereby making the charge storage period of the 15 photodiode variable. The signal charge stored in pixels is read out on a row-by-row basis responsive to a horizontal sync signal. Thus, the electronic shuttering operation is also performed on the row-by-row basis (which is called a "focal plane operation"). More specifically, the electronic 20 shuttering operation is performed on a certain row and then the signal charge starts to be stored. And after a predetermined time has passed since the start of charge storage, a signal readout operation is performed. When the readout operation is started, the storage section is reset 25 again for the readout. The "predetermined time" defines the

charge storage period of each photodiode and is of an equal length for every row. Accordingly, supposing each pixel is receiving light with the same intensity, the same quantity of charge will be stored on each and every row theoretically speaking.

Figure 1 illustrates a schematic configuration of a conventional amplifying solid-state imaging device 100. In the device 100, an imaging section is made up of a plurality of pixels 102 arranged in columns and rows. Each of these pixels 102 includes a photodiode for storing charge in a quantity corresponding to the amount of light received. As shown in Figure 1, a row select encoder 103 for selecting one pixel row after another from the imaging section is disposed on the right-hand side of the imaging section. In the example illustrated in Figure 1, the number of pixel rows is m , which is equal to or larger than two. The row select encoder 103 includes the number m of row selectors that are connected in series to each other. An i^{th} (where $1 \leq i \leq m$) row selector generates a reset signal for the electronic shuttering operation at a predetermined time, and then sends the signal to all the pixels 102 belonging to the i^{th} row. The row selectors included in the row select encoder 103 output the reset signal for the electronic shuttering operation at respectively times, which are different from each other among the rows. That is to say, the reset signal is sequentially

output in the descending order, i.e., from the first through m^{th} rows.

On the other hand, the row selecting operation for readout (i.e., an ordinary row selection) is also performed sequentially by the number m of row selectors. The interval between the electronic shuttering and readout operations is preset at the same length for every row. The signal read out from a selected row is supplied by a column select driver 107 to an output buffer 111, from which the signal is output as a 10 pixel signal.

When the electronic shuttering operation is performed, the photodiode within each pixel 102 has the potential thereof compulsorily reset at a predetermined level (which will be called a "reset potential" in this specification). 15 The reset potential is supposed to be the same in each and every pixel 102 as a matter of principle. However, the present inventors found that since a reset potential on a certain row might shift into a different reset potential on another row, horizontal noise might appear on the screen as a 20 result. The horizontal noise always appears on a particular set of rows on the screen, thus degrading the resultant image quality.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

25 An object of the present invention is providing (1) an

amplifying solid-state imaging device that can substantially eliminate the horizontal noise resulting from the electronic shuttering operation and (2) a method for driving the device.

To achieve this object, the present invention provides 5 dummy pixel rows and drives these dummy pixel rows in the same way as an imaging section within an effective pixel area, thereby providing a reset signal for the electronic shuttering operation to each pixel row in the imaging section. As a result, the reset potentials resulting from 10 the electronic shuttering operation can be equalized among all the pixels within the imaging section, thus eliminating the horizontal noise from the screen.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

15 Figure 1 illustrates a schematic configuration of a conventional amplifying solid-state imaging device.

Figure 2 illustrates a detailed configuration of a pixel in an amplifying solid-state imaging device.

20 Figure 3 illustrates a configuration for an amplifying solid-state imaging device according to a first embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied by the row selectors within the row select encoder shown in Figure 3.

25 Figure 5 is a circuit diagram illustrating a row

selector associated with an i^{th} row and included in the row select encoder shown in Figure 3.

Figure 6 is a timing diagram illustrating some control signals associated with the i^{th} and n^{th} rows in the device shown in Figure 3, where $1 \leq i \leq m$ and $n \neq i$.

Figures 7, 8, 9 and 10 illustrate an equivalent circuit of a pixel on the i^{th} row, a schematic cross-sectional structure of the resetting device and a distribution of surface potentials at the times **a-1**, **b-1**, **c** and **d** shown in Figure 6, respectively.

Figure 11 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied by the row selectors within the row select encoder in the conventional device shown in Figure 1 including no dummy pixels.

Figure 12 is a timing diagram illustrating some control signals associated with the i^{th} and n^{th} rows in the conventional device shown in Figure 1, where $1 \leq i \leq m$ and $n \neq i$.

Figures 13 and 14 illustrate an equivalent circuit of a pixel on the i^{th} row, a schematic cross-sectional structure of the resetting device and a distribution of surface potentials at the times **a-2** and **b-2** shown in Figure 12, respectively.

Figure 15 illustrates a configuration for an amplifying solid-state imaging device according to a second embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 16 is a circuit diagram illustrating respective

configurations of the row selector associated with the m^{th} row and the dummy row selector in the device shown in Figure 15.

Figure 17 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied from the row selectors and the dummy row selector in the device shown in Figure 15.

Figure 18 illustrates a configuration for an amplifying solid-state imaging device according to a third embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 19 is a circuit diagram illustrating respective configurations of the row selector associated with the m^{th} row and the dummy row selector in the device shown in Figure 18.

Figure 20 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied from the row selectors and the dummy row selector in the device shown in Figure 18.

Figure 21 is a circuit diagram illustrating another exemplary pixel configuration usable according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Hereinafter, preferred embodiments of an amplifying solid-state imaging device according to the present invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate a configuration of an amplifying solid-state imaging device 1 according to a first exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

First, referring to Figure 2, the amplifying solid-state imaging device 1 includes a plurality of pixels 2 arranged in matrix, i.e., in columns and rows, within a semiconductor region, which may be a region in a silicon substrate.

5 Although a 2×2 matrix of pixels is illustrated in Figure 2, a great number of pixels are actually formed in columns and rows. In this specification, the respective numbers of rows and columns of pixels provided within an effective pixel area to generate pixel signals are represented by m and l (where m and l are both positive integers equal to or larger than 10 two). In a typical solid-state imaging device, m and l are both within the range from 50 to 2,000. In this embodiment, m and l are supposed to be 480 and 640, respectively.

Each of these pixels 2 includes a signal storage section, 15 which in turn includes a photoelectric transducer like a photodiode. Responsive to light incident on the photoelectric transducer, each signal storage section can store information, corresponding to the intensity of the light, as a "potential or a quantity of charge". Although each photoelectric 20 transducer is in a first potential state (reset potential) during resetting, a state transition subsequently takes place from the first into a second potential state as a result of creation and storage of charge responsive to the incident light. The second potential state is represented by a level 25 variable with the intensity of the incoming light. In this

specification, the "second potential state" is variable with the total amount of light that has been incident on the photoelectric transducer after resetting was performed as the electronic shuttering operation. A more detailed internal 5 configuration of each pixel 2 will be described later.

The device 1 includes a plurality of lines and circuits for selecting and accessing a particular one of the pixels 2. These lines, circuits, transistors constituting respective pixels and so on are formed on a substrate by various 10 techniques similar to well known ones for fabricating a semiconductor integrated circuit. In this embodiment, a row select encoder 3 is electrically connected to all of the pixels 2 through plural pairs of reset and row select lines 4 and 5. Each single reset line 4 is connected to all of the 15 pixels 2 belonging to a single row associated with the reset line 4. In the same way, each single row select line 5 is also connected to all of the pixels 2 belonging to a single row associated with the row select line 5. That is to say, the number of the pairs of lines 4 and 5, extending from the 20 row select encoder 3, is equal to the number of the pixel rows in the matrix.

To select a particular one of the rows, the row select encoder 3 selectively changes the potential on a row select line 5 associated with the particular row from logically 25 "Low" into "High", for example. In this case, the potentials

on the other row select lines 5 associated with the remaining rows are held at logically "Low". As a result, a potential, corresponding to the logically "High" state, is supplied to the respective control terminals of switching devices in all 5 the pixels 2 included in the particular row, thereby turning these switching devices ON. Upon the activation of the switching devices, potentials, corresponding to the information that has been stored in respective signal storage sections on the selected row, appear on associated vertical 10 signal lines 6. In this case, the signal storage section of each pixel 2 is electrically disconnected from an associated vertical signal line 6 on the remaining rows other than the selected one. The configuration and operation of a circuit for sensing information this way will be described in greater 15 detail later.

The information, which has been stored in the signal storage sections of all the pixels 2 included in a selected row, is output to all the corresponding vertical signal lines 6 and then read out column by column by a horizontal shift 20 register (column select driver) 7. The information is ultimately output as a signal through an output buffer (output amplifier) 11.

Next, the configuration of each pixel 2 according to this embodiment will be described in further detail. As 25 shown in Figure 2, the pixel 2 includes: a photodiode 21

functioning as a signal storage section; and an MOS transistor 23, whose gate electrode 22 is connected to the photodiode 21. The photodiode 21 is implementable as a pn junction diode formed in a silicon substrate, for example.

5 The MOS transistor 23 may have an ordinary MOS structure including channel, source and drain regions within a silicon substrate, for example. The MOS transistor 23 functions as a driver (amplifier) in a signal detector, which plays an important role in amplifying and reading out a tiny variation 10 in the potential state of the photodiode 21. In the illustrated embodiment, no capacitor is particularly inserted between the gate electrode 22 of the MOS transistor 23 and the photodiode 21. Optionally, a capacitor may be inserted therebetween.

15 The pixel 2 further includes a resetting device 24 and a switching device 25. The resetting device 24 is an MOS transistor (reset transistor), whose gate electrode is connected to an associated reset line 4. The drain of the MOS transistor 24 is connected to a first power supply 20 terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through a power line 260, and the source thereof is connected to the photodiode 21. When the potential on the reset line 4 associated with the selected row is selectively changed by the row select encoder 3 from logically "Low" into "High", the resetting devices 24 on the 25 selected row turn ON. As a result, the charge stored on the

photodiodes 21 is drained toward the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the power line 260. The potential at each photodiode 21, i.e., that at the gate electrode 22 of the driver 23, is compulsorily reset at a certain value 5 determined by the supply potential V_{DD} at the first power supply terminal 26. After the resetting operation is finished, the potential at the photodiode 21 gradually varies with the intensity of light received by the pixel 2. It is because carriers are created due to the photoelectric 10 conversion function of the photodiode 21 and then stored in the photodiode 21 that the potential state of the photodiode 21 is variable with the incidence of light.

The switching device 25 in each pixel 2 is an MOS transistor, whose gate electrode is connected to an 15 associated row select line 5. The drain of the MOS transistor 25 is connected to the source of the driver 23 and the source thereof is connected to an associated vertical signal line 6. When the potential on the row select line 5 shown in Figure 2 is selectively changed by the row select 20 encoder 3 from logically "Low" into "High", the switching device 25 turns ON. As a result, current flows from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the driver 23, switching device 25, vertical signal line 6 and load device 27 into a second power supply terminal (V_{SS}) 28. In this 25 case, the potential on the vertical signal line 6 is variable

with the potential state of the photodiode 21 (i.e., the potential at the gate electrode 22 of the MOS transistor 23). Accordingly, the potential on the vertical signal line 6 has a level variable with the second potential state at the 5 signal storage section of the pixel 2.

Considering a particular column, the driver 23, belonging to the selected row, and an associated load device 27 are connected in series to each other between the first and second power supply terminals (V_{DD}) 26 and (V_{SS}) 28 to form a 10 source follower circuit. In other words, a single load device 27 is allocated to each column, and each driver 23 on the selected row is electrically connected to an associated load device 27 via an associated switching device 25. Such a source follower circuit can amplify the quantity of signal charge 15 stored in each pixel and then output the charge as a potential signal. In this specification, the load devices 27 corresponding to all the columns will sometimes be collectively called a "load circuit" 30.

To utilize the chip area effectively, the same power is 20 supplied from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the common power line 260 to the photodiodes 21 for the resetting purpose, and to the source follower circuits.

Next, the feature of the amplifying solid-state imaging device 1 according to the first embodiment will be described 25 with reference to Figure 3. As shown in Figure 3, the device

1 additionally includes at least one dummy pixel row, which
is provided separately from the number m of ordinary pixel
rows. The number m of pixel rows are located within an
effective pixel area and make up an imaging section. On the
5 other hand, the at least one dummy pixel row is located out
of the effective pixel area and makes up a dummy imaging
section. According to this embodiment, the number of the
dummy pixel row(s) is obtained by subtracting m from the
number of horizontal sync signals included in one frame
10 interval. In this specification, the number of the horizontal
sync signals per frame interval will be called an "HD number".
In this exemplary embodiment, since m is 480 and the HD number
is 525 (in compliance with the NTSC standard), the number of
the dummy pixel row(s) (=HD number- m) is 45.

15 Each of the pixels belonging to every dummy pixel row has
totally the same configuration as each pixel located within
the effective pixel area. That is to say, each pixel on every
dummy pixel row also includes the photodiode 21 and
transistors just like the pixel 2 shown in Figure 2, and is
20 also connected to the load circuit 30 and to the column select
driver 7 through the associated vertical signal line 6. Thus,
according to this embodiment, the ordinary imaging section
cannot be distinguished from the dummy imaging section by
appearances.

25 When a dummy pixel row is selected by the row select

encoder 3, the resetting and switching devices 24 and 25 included in the pixels belonging to the dummy pixel row receive a control signal and operate normally. Turn the switching device 25 ON within a dummy pixel, and a current 5 flows from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the driver 23 and switching device 25 within the dummy pixel, vertical signal line 6 and load device 27 into the second power supply terminal (V_{SS}) 28 as shown in Figure 2.

However, the dummy pixels do not have to store signal 10 information responsive to incoming light. Instead, each dummy pixel has only to allow the current to flow from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the driver 23, switching device 25, vertical signal line 6 and load device 27 into the second power supply terminal (V_{SS}) 28 by turning 15 the switching device 25 ON just like an ordinary pixel. Accordingly, the dummy pixels need not perform photoelectric conversion function, either. In view of their intended function, the dummy pixels may be covered with a light blocking film and need not include any photodiode. That is to 20 say, the role expected of the dummy pixel row is to equalize the reset potentials among all the rows within the imaging section by preventing a reset state from being varied on a pixel row, on which resetting is being carried out as the electronic shuttering operation. This function of the dummy 25 pixel row will be described in further detail later. Before

that, it will be described with reference to Figure 4 how the device 1 is driven.

Figure 4 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied by the row selectors included in the row select encoder 3. On the top of Figure 4, the waveform of the horizontal sync signal **HD** is illustrated. In synchronism with the horizontal sync signal **HD**, the row selectors send the row select signals **SL₁** through **SL_{m+3}**, and reset signals **RS₁** through **RS_{m+3}**, to associated rows. In Figure 4, only the signals associated with just a few rows are illustrated. It is noted that the time progresses rightward in Figure 4.

In Figure 4, **VSIN** is a signal getting a row selecting operation for signal reading started by the row select encoder 3. **VSSIN** is a signal getting a row selecting operation for electronic shuttering started by the row select encoder 3. The signal **VSIN** is input to the row select encoder 3 once a frame interval, while the signal **VSSIN** is input to the row select encoder 3 at least once a frame interval. **CSL** is a selection sync signal defining respective times the readout operation should be performed, while **CRS** is a reset sync signal defining respective times the reset operation should be performed. The row select encoder 3 receives these signals and generates various types of control signals in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal **HD**, thereby performing the electronic shuttering and row

selecting operations.

Figure 5 illustrates a row selector associated with an i^{th} row. The row selectors associated with the first through $(m+3)^{\text{rd}}$ rows, each having the configuration shown in Figure 5, are connected in series together to form the row select encoder 3. The row select encoder 3 includes two columns of vertical shift registers, i.e., first and second shift registers. Each vertical shift register includes a plurality of flip-flop circuits 50, which are connected in series to each other.

The 1^{st} -row part of the first shift register receives the horizontal sync signal **HD** and the start pulse signal **VSIN** supplied as a trigger of the readout operation. The output Q_i of the i^{th} -row part of the first shift register is supplied to the D terminal of the flip-flop circuit 50 included in the $(i+1)^{\text{st}}$ -row part of the first shift register. In this manner, the first shift register sequentially performs such an output operation from the first through the last rows in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal **HD**. On the other hand, the 1^{st} -row part of the second shift register receives the horizontal sync signal **HD** and the start pulse signal **VSSIN** supplied as a trigger of the electronic shuttering operation. The output Q_{S_i} of the i^{th} -row part of the second shift register is supplied to the D terminal of the flip-flop circuit 50 included in the $(i+1)^{\text{st}}$ -row part of the second shift

register. In this manner, the second shift register also performs a similar output operation sequentially from the first through the last rows in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal **HD**.

5 Based on the outputs Q_1 and QS_1 of the first and second shift registers, the selection sync signal **CSL** and the reset sync signal **CRS**, the row select encoder 3 generates the row select signal SL_1 and reset signal RS_1 at respective times shown in Figure 4. Then, the row select encoder 3 supplies
10 these control signals to the pixels on the i^{th} row through the row select and reset lines 5 and 4 associated with the i^{th} row.

Referring back to Figure 4, while the signal **VSIN** is being at the logically "High" level, a first pulse of the
15 horizontal sync signal **HD** is supplied as the first HD for the frame interval in question. Thereafter, when the 525th HD is supplied, the frame interval ends. And after the signal **VSIN** has risen to the "High" level, the next frame interval starts.

20 In synchronism with the first HD, the row select encoder 3 generates the row select signal SL_1 and the reset signal RS_1 , and sends these control signals to the pixels on the first row to perform a readout operation on the pixels belonging to the first row. Thereafter, in synchronism with the second
25 HD, the row select encoder 3 generates the row select signal

5 **SL₂**, and the reset signal **RS₂**, and sends these control signals to the pixels on the second row to perform a readout operation on the pixels belonging to the second row. A similar operation will be sequentially performed on the remaining rows.

On the other hand, in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal supplied while the signal **VSSIN** is being at the logically "High" level (i.e., the fourth HD in Figure 4), the row select encoder 3 generates the reset signal **RS₁**, and sends 10 the signal to the pixels on the first row. As a result, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is carried out on all the pixels belonging to the first row. Thereafter, in synchronism with the fifth HD, the row select encoder 3 generates the reset signal **RS₂**, and sends the signal 15 to the pixels on the second row. As a result, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is carried out on all the pixels belonging to the second row. A similar operation will be sequentially performed on the remaining rows.

As can be seen from Figure 4, whenever a reset signal 20 for the electronic shuttering operation is supplied to an arbitrary i^{th} (where $1 \leq i \leq m$) row included in the effective pixel area, a readout operation is performed on another row. For example, while resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed on the m^{th} row, a readout 25 operation is being performed on the $(m+3)^{\text{rd}}$ row. Were it not

for the dummy pixel rows, i.e., the $(m+1)^{st}$ through $(m+3)^{rd}$ rows in this case, the readout operation could not be performed on any row while resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed on the $(m-2)^{nd}$ to the m^{th} rows

5 According to this embodiment, dummy pixel rows are provided and driven just like the other rows in the imaging section within the effective pixel area. In this manner, a reset signal for the electronic shuttering operation can be supplied to each and every row within the imaging section
10 under the same condition. Thus, reset potentials resulting from the electronic shuttering operation can be equalized among all the pixels within the imaging section, and therefore, no horizontal noise appears on the screen anymore. Hereinafter, it will be described in further detail why the
15 horizontal noise disappears thanks to the existence of dummy pixels.

Figure 6 is a timing diagram illustrating respective control signals associated with the i^{th} and n^{th} rows, where $1 \leq i \leq m$ and $n \neq i$. First, at a time $a-1$, a control signal for
20 the electronic shuttering operation is being supplied to the i^{th} row, but the row select signal SL_i remains "Low". Accordingly, the switching devices 25 on the i^{th} row are kept OFF. In contrast, since the reset signal RS_i has risen to
25 the "High" level, the MOS transistors, which function as the resetting devices 24 on the i^{th} row, have been turned ON and

are now conducting. As a result, the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 is electrically connected to the photodiodes 21, and the charge that has been stored on the photodiodes 21 is drained to the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26. By 5 performing the reset operation in this manner, the potential in the charge storage region of each of these photodiodes 21 is compulsorily reset at the first potential.

Next, at a time $b-1$, a readout operation is being performed on the i^{th} row. The readout operation is started 10 by turning the switching devices 25 on the i^{th} row ON with the rise of the row select signal SL_i from the "Low" into "High" level. While the switching devices 25 on the i^{th} row are conducting, current flows from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 toward the second power supply terminal (V_{SS}) 15 28 through the vertical signal lines 6 as described above. As a result, a signal potential, corresponding to the quantity of charge that has been created and stored on the pixels on the i^{th} row between the time $a-1$ during resetting for the electronic shuttering operation and the time $b-1$, is 20 output onto the vertical signal lines 6.

Subsequently, at a time c , the reset signal RS_i has risen from the "Low" into the "High" level, thereby turning the resetting devices 24 on the i^{th} row ON. On the other hand, the switching devices 25 on the i^{th} row are kept ON. 25 Since the reset signal RS_i has risen to the "High" level, the

MOS transistors, which function as the resetting devices 24 on the i^{th} row, have also been turned ON and are now conducting. As a result, the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 is electrically connected to the photodiodes 21, and 5 the charge that has been stored on the photodiodes 21 is drained to the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26.

Then, at a time d , the potential state of the photodiodes 21 after resetting is sensed. This sensing operation is performed in the same way as that performed at 10 the time $b-1$ before resetting. And based on a change in potential state of the photodiodes 21 before and after resetting at the time c , the information that has been stored in the pixels is read out as a signal.

According to this embodiment, at the time $a-1$, a reset 15 operation for electronic shuttering is being performed on the i^{th} row, while a readout operation is being performed on the n^{th} row. The n^{th} row may be any arbitrary row belonging to either the ordinary imaging section or the dummy imaging section. The readout operation on the n^{th} row is started by 20 turning the switching devices 25 on the n^{th} row ON with the rise of the row select signal SL_n from the "Low" into "High" level. While the switching devices 25 on the n^{th} row are conducting, current flows from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 toward the second power supply terminal (V_{SS}) 25 28 through the vertical signal lines 6 as described above.

As a result, a signal potential, corresponding to the quantity of charge that has been stored on the pixels on the n^{th} row, is output onto the vertical signal lines 6.

If the n^{th} row belongs to the ordinary imaging section, the potential, which has been output onto the vertical signal lines 6 as a result of the readout operation, is usable as an effective pixel signal. In contrast, if the n^{th} row belongs to the dummy imaging section, the potential, which has been output onto the vertical signal lines 6 as a result of the readout operation, is non-usable as an effective pixel signal. The readout operation on the dummy imaging section is performed for the very purpose of making the current flow from the first to second power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 to (V_{SS}) 28 through the vertical signal lines 6 while resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed on the i^{th} row (where $1 \leq i \leq m$).

Hereinafter, the potential states of a photodiode 21 on the i^{th} row while these operations are being performed will be described with reference to Figures 7 through 10.

Figure 7 illustrates an equivalent circuit of a pixel on the i^{th} row, a schematic cross-sectional structure of the resetting device 24 and a distribution of surface potentials at the time a-1. In the example illustrated in Figure 7, the resetting device 24 is implemented as an n-channel MOS transistor. An n-type doped region of the photodiode 21 also

functions as the source region of the resetting device 24. The resetting device 24 is surrounded by a field oxide 33 such as a LOCOS film. A channel stopper 32 doped with a p-type dopant is formed under the field oxide 33.

5 At the time a-1, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed. Accordingly, the potential at the photodiode 21 (more specifically, a surface potential of the n-type doped regions of the photodiode 21) is substantially equal to a potential in the drain region 31 of 10 the resetting device 24 (hereinafter, simply referred to as a "reset drain 31"). The reset drain 31 is connected to the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the power line 260. Since a readout operation is performed on the n^{th} row according to this embodiment, a source follower current I_a 15 flows through the power line 260. This current I_a is much larger than the current flowing from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 to the photodiode 21 on the i^{th} row as a result of resetting the photodiode 21 (hereinafter, this current will be referred to as "reset drain current"). For 20 example, the source follower current I_a flowing through the load circuit 30 is on the orders of several to several hundreds μA , whereas the reset drain current is on the orders of several to several hundreds fA. Supposing the principal resistance of the power line is represented as R_i , 25 a voltage drop of $I_a \times R_i$ is caused in the power supplied to

the reset drain 31. Thus, the potential at the reset drain 31 is represented as $V_{DD}' = V_{DD} - I_d \times R_i$.

The interconnection resistance of the common power line 260 differs depending on the layout thereof, but is 5 ordinarily on the orders of several tens Ω to several $k\Omega$. Suppose the source follower current I_a per pixel is $10\mu A$, the reset drain current is $10fA$ and the interconnection resistance of the common power line 260 is $1 k\Omega$, for instance. In such a case, the voltage drop of the power supplied to the pixel 10 while the reset drain current is flowing is $10 fA \times 1 k\Omega = 10$ pV. On the other hand, the voltage drop of the power supplied to the pixel while the source follower current is flowing is $10 \mu A \times 1 k\Omega = 10$ mV. As can be seen, since the reset drain current is negligible compared to the source follower current, 15 the effects of the voltage drop thereof are also negligible.

At the time a-1, since the switching device 25 on the i^{th} row is not conducting, no source follower current flows through the switching device 25 on the i^{th} row. It should be noted, however, that the source follower current I_a does flow 20 through the switching device 25 on the n^{th} row. As described above, according to this embodiment, whenever resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed on an arbitrary i^{th} row (where $1 \leq i \leq m$), a readout operation is being performed on another row. This principle is applicable 25 to all the rows within the effective pixel area (where $i=1$,

2, ..., m-1, and m).

Next, referring to Figure 8, charge has been stored in the photodiode 21 at the time b-1, when the potential thereof is $(V_{DD}' - V_{sig})$ that has decreased by V_{sig} from the potential V_{DD}' 5 at the time of resetting. The magnitude of V_{sig} is determined depending on the quantity of charge that has been created and stored through photoelectric conversion. This potential $(V_{DD}' - V_{sig})$ is applied to the gate electrode of the driver 23. Also, at the time b-1, the readout operation on the i^{th} row 10 has already been started, and the source follower current I_a is now flowing through the power line 260. This current I_a flows from the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26 through the driver 23 and switching device 25 on the i^{th} row into the load circuit 30. Since the readout operation is not being 15 performed on the rows other than the i^{th} row, the source follower current I_a flowing through the other rows at the time b-1 is substantially the same as that at the time a-1. At the time b-1, no reset drain current flows, but this current is negligible as described above.

20 Then, referring to Figure 9, resetting for the readout operation is being performed at the time c and the charge that has been stored in the photodiode 21 is being drained to the first power supply terminal (V_{DD}) 26. As a result, the potential at the photodiode 21 is equalized with the 25 potential V_{DD}' of the reset drain 31. The potential V_{DD}' is

applied to the gate electrode of the driver 23. Accordingly, a signal potential corresponding to the potential V_{DD}' starts to appear on the vertical signal line 6.

Subsequently, referring to Figure 10, the resetting device 24 has been turned OFF again at the time d. Immediately after resetting, the potential V_{DD}' was applied to the gate electrode of the driver 23. Accordingly, a signal potential corresponding to the potential V_{DD}' appears on the vertical signal line 6. As a result, the signal information sensed from the pixel on the i^{th} row has a magnitude represented as $V_{DD}' - (V_{DD}' - V_{\text{sig}}) = V_{\text{sig}}$.

As described above, according to this embodiment, the potential at the photodiode 21 is compulsorily reset at V_{DD}' by resetting for the electronic shuttering operation. If a light blocking metal film made of aluminum, for example, is used as the power line 260 to isolate the respective pixels from each other, then the potentials V_{DD}' can be substantially equalized among all the rows. In other words, the variation in reset potential between a pair of pixel rows can be suppressed. As a result, an image of high quality with reduced horizontal noise can be provided.

Next, it will be described with reference to Figures 11 through 14 how horizontal noise is caused in a conventional amplifying solid-state imaging device including no dummy pixels. This device is obtained by removing the dummy pixels

and associated row selectors from the device 1 shown in Figure 3. In this case, the number of horizontal sync signals HD included in one frame interval is not equal to the number of pixel rows.

5 Figure 11 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied by the row selectors in the row select encoder within the amplifying solid-state imaging device including no dummy pixels as a comparative example of the timing diagram illustrated in Figure 4. As shown in Figure
10 11, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed on the first row and a readout operation is being performed on the fourth row at a time I. At a time II, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed on the m^{th} row, but no readout operation is being
15 performed on any row.

Figure 12 is a timing diagram illustrating respective control signals associated with the i^{th} and n^{th} rows, where $1 \leq i \leq m$, $1 \leq n \leq m$ and $n \neq i$. First, at a time $a-2$, a control signal for the electronic shuttering operation is being supplied to the i^{th} row. That is to say, the row select signal SL_i remains "Low", but the reset signal RS_i has risen to the "High" level. Accordingly, the resetting devices 24 on the i^{th} row are now conducting. As a result, the potential in the charge storage region of each photodiode 21 is
25 compulsorily reset at the first potential. At the time $a-2$,

no readout operation is being performed on any row other than the i^{th} row. In such a case, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation is being performed as shown in Figure 13. Accordingly, the potential at the photodiode 21 is 5 equalized with a potential at the reset drain 31. Since no source follower current I_a is flowing through the power line 260 at this time, the potential at the reset drain 31 is substantially equal to V_{DD} . Accordingly, the potential at the photodiode 21 after resetting is also V_{DD} . Thereafter, the 10 photodiode 21 will create and store charge in a quantity corresponding to the amount of light received.

Next, at a time $b-2$, a readout operation is being performed on the i^{th} row. At this time, the source follower current I_a is now flowing through the power line 260 and the 15 pixel on the i^{th} row as shown in Figure 14. Accordingly, the potential at the reset drain 31 decreases to $V_{DD}' = V_{DD} - I_a \times R_i$. On the other hand, the potential at the photodiode 21 is $(V_{DD} - V_{sig})$ that has decreased by V_{sig} from the potential V_{DD} at the time of resetting. As described above, the magnitude of V_{sig} 20 is determined depending on the quantity of charge that has been created and stored through photoelectric conversion. This potential $(V_{DD} - V_{sig})$ is applied to the gate electrode of the driver 23.

Subsequently, at a time c , resetting for the readout 25 operation is being performed. At this time, since the source

follower current I_d is flowing through the power line 260 and the pixel on the i^{th} row, the potential at the photodiode 21 is compulsorily reset at $V_{DD}' = V_{DD} - I_d \times R_i$.

As a result, the signal information sensed from the 5 pixel on the i^{th} row at the time d has a magnitude corresponding to $V_{DD}' - (V_{DD} - V_{sig})$.

In contrast, if the readout operation is being performed on any other row while resetting for the electronic 10 shuttering operation is being performed on the i^{th} row, then signal information with a magnitude corresponding to V_{sig} is obtained as already described with reference to Figures 7 through 10. Accordingly, in the conventional device, a variation corresponding to the potential difference $(V_{DD}' - V_{DD})$ is caused among the output signals of respective rows.

15 As can be seen from Figure 11, resetting for the electronic shuttering operation on a particular row and readout on any other row might be performed concurrently in the conventional amplifying solid-state imaging device. In the conventional device, however, while resetting for the 20 electronic shuttering operation is being performed on another particular row (e.g., the m^{th} row), no readout operation might be being performed on any other row. That is to say, the reset state resulting from the electronic shuttering operation differs among the rows, thus causing the horizontal 25 noise.

In contrast, according to the present invention, the electronic shuttering operation is performed under the same condition for the respective rows within the effective pixel area. For that purpose, dummy pixel rows are provided in 5 this embodiment, thereby equalizing the total number of pixel rows with the number of horizontal sync signals (i.e., the HD number) included in one frame interval.

Figure 15 illustrates a configuration for an amplifying solid-state imaging device 60 according to a second 10 embodiment of the present invention. The device 60 is different from the device 1 of the first embodiment in the number of dummy rows. In addition, the device 60 further includes a dummy row selector **A** unlike the device 1.

According to the second embodiment, the number of dummy 15 rows is one. Also, the dummy row selector **A** has a different configuration than that of the other first through m^{th} row selectors. It should be noted that according to the first embodiment, the row selectors for the dummy rows have the same configuration as the row selectors for effective pixels.

Figure 16 illustrates respective configurations of the 20 row selector associated with the m^{th} row and the dummy row selector **A**. The dummy row selector **A** includes a D flip-flop 52 with a reset terminal **R**, at which the start pulse signal **VSIN** is received. More specifically, the dummy row selector 25 **A** continuously outputs control signals **SL_{dummy}** and **RS_{dummy}** in

syncronism with the horizontal sync signal **HD** after the D flip-flop 52 has received the output **Q_m** of the m^{th} row selector and until a start pulse signal **VSIN** for the next frame interval is received.

5 Figure 17 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied from the row selectors in the row select encoder 3 and the dummy row selector **A** within the amplifying solid-state imaging device 60. As shown in Figure 17, after the readout operation has been performed on the m^{th} row, the
10 row select signal **SL_{dummy}** and the reset signal **RS_{dummy}** are repeatedly output in syncronism with the horizontal sync signal **HD**. In other words, the readout operation is repeatedly performed on the same dummy pixel row. Thus,
15 after the readout operation has been performed on all the rows within the ordinary imaging section and before the next frame interval begins, the readout operation is repeatedly performed on the dummy row, not on the ordinary imaging section. As a result, resetting for the electronic
20 shuttering operation is performed under the same condition on all the rows within the ordinary imaging section.

According to the second embodiment, even if the number of horizontal sync signals included in one frame interval has been changed, the device 60 still can operate normally.

Figure 18 illustrates a configuration for an amplifying
25 solid-state imaging device 70 according to a third embodiment

of the present invention. The device 70 is different from the device 60 of the second embodiment in the construction of the dummy row selector. The dummy row selector B according to the third embodiment may have a configuration shown in 5 Figure 19. Responsive to the output Q_m of the m^{th} row selector, the dummy row selector B starts to output the control signals SL_{dummy} and RS_{dummy} in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal HD. Thereafter, the dummy row selector B continuously outputs the control signals SL_{dummy} and 10 RS_{dummy} in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal HD until the selector B receives the start pulse signal VSIN or until resetting for the electronic shuttering operation on the m^{th} row ends.

Figure 20 is a timing diagram illustrating control signals supplied from the row selectors in the row select encoder 3 and the dummy row selector B within the amplifying solid-state imaging device 70 according to the third embodiment. As shown in Figure 20, after the readout operation has been performed on the m^{th} row and until 20 resetting for the electronic shuttering operation on the m^{th} row ends, the row select signal SL_{dummy} and the reset signal RS_{dummy} are repeatedly output in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal HD. Thus, after the readout operation has been performed on all the rows within the ordinary 25 imaging section and before resetting for the electronic

shuttering operation has been performed on all the rows within the ordinary imaging section, the readout operation is repeatedly performed on the dummy row, not on the ordinary imaging section. As a result, resetting for the electronic 5 shuttering operation is performed under the same condition on all the rows within the ordinary imaging section.

The device 70 according to the third embodiment is more advantageous than the device 60 according to the second embodiment in that the dummy row is driven a required minimum 10 number of times to cut down the power dissipation.

According to the second and third embodiments, just one dummy row is provided. Alternatively, a plurality of dummy row may be provided instead. For example, if two dummy rows are provided, then two dummy row selectors are provided 15 correspondingly. In such a case, the readout operation is performed alternately and repeatedly on these dummy rows in synchronism with the horizontal sync signal HD.

Also, according to the second and third embodiments, the readout operation on the dummy row is performed at a 20 relatively late stage of a frame interval. However, according to the first embodiment, the readout operation on the dummy row may be performed at a relatively early stage of the frame interval. In the example illustrated in Figure 3, the dummy rows (i.e., the $(m+1)^{th}$ through 525th rows) are disposed under 25 the effective pixel area (i.e., the 1st through m^{th} rows).

Alternatively, these dummy rows may be disposed over the effective pixel area.

In the foregoing embodiments, the reset signal for the electronic shuttering operation is generated within the row 5 select encoder 3 and then output therefrom. However, the present invention is in no way limited to such a specific embodiment. For example, a circuit for generating the reset signal for the electronic shuttering operation may be disposed on the left-hand side of the imaging section shown in Figure 10 3. And a circuit for outputting a control signal for the readout operation (row selectors) may be disposed on the right-hand side of the imaging section. Also, the disposition of these circuits may be inverted horizontally.

Moreover, according to the present invention, a pixel 15 with a configuration shown in Figure 21 may also be used. In the pixel shown in Figure 21, a transfer gate 56 is provided in addition to the photodiode 21 within the signal storage section and a potential of a capacitor 55, which is connected to a signal storage node, is applied to the gate electrode of 20 the driver 23. In other words, the source follower circuit senses a potential at the signal storage node. As can be seen, the present invention is not limited to the pixel configuration exemplified in the foregoing embodiments. In Figure 21, a signal TR_1 is supplied to the transfer gate 56 25 for controlling the ON/OFF states thereof.

The present invention is generally applicable to any MOS solid-state imaging device of such a type as amplifying and sensing signal charge stored on a pixel by making current flow through a load circuit. For example, a signal detector 5 may be constructed using an inverter instead of the source follower circuit. The key point is that the detector is at least required to sense, amplify and output signal charge stored within a pixel before and after resetting.

In the foregoing embodiments, the row select encoder 3 10 includes two columns of vertical shift registers. Thus, the rows are selected sequentially in a physical space. Alternatively, a row select encoder for accessing rows located at physically random positions may also be used.